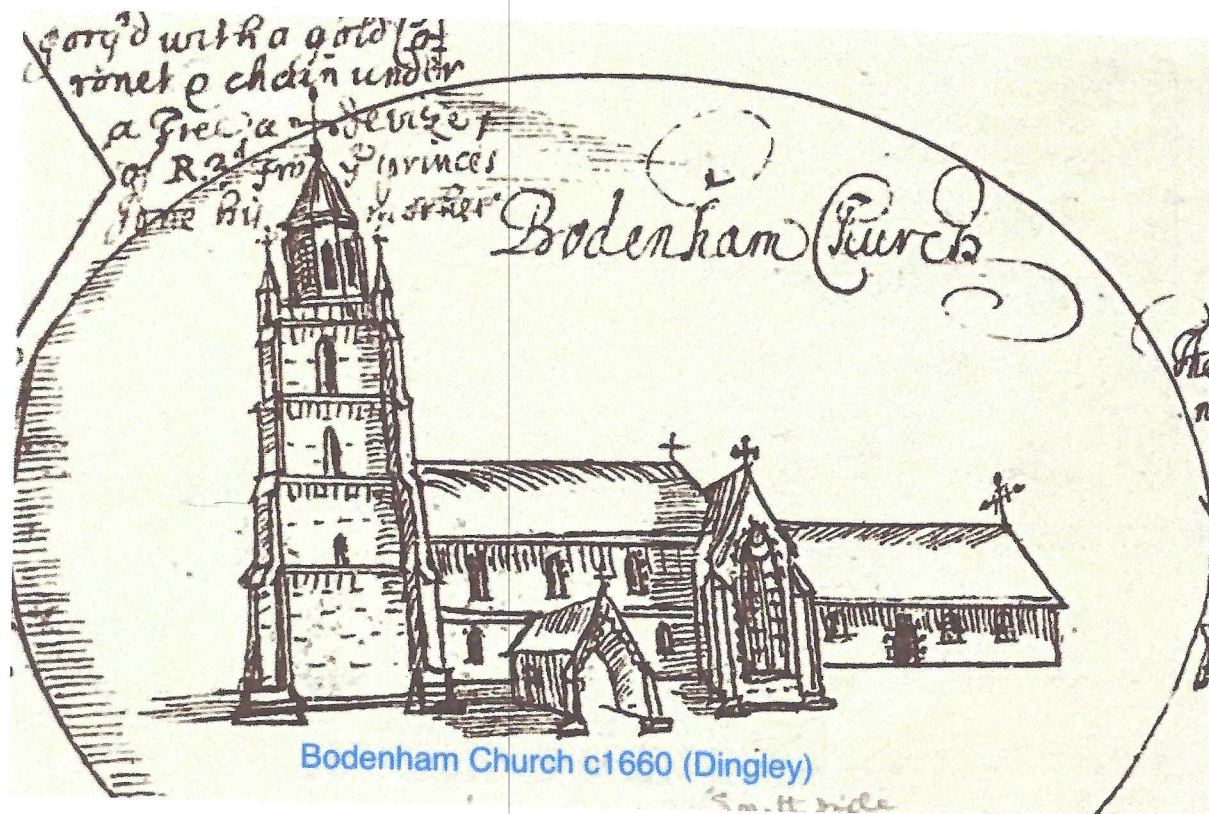


The Architectural History of Bodenham Church

Part I: The Medieval Church



The site:

The recent flooding of the church has prompted many people to query why the church was built so close to the river. What follows are some speculative thoughts which might go some way to justifying such a choice.

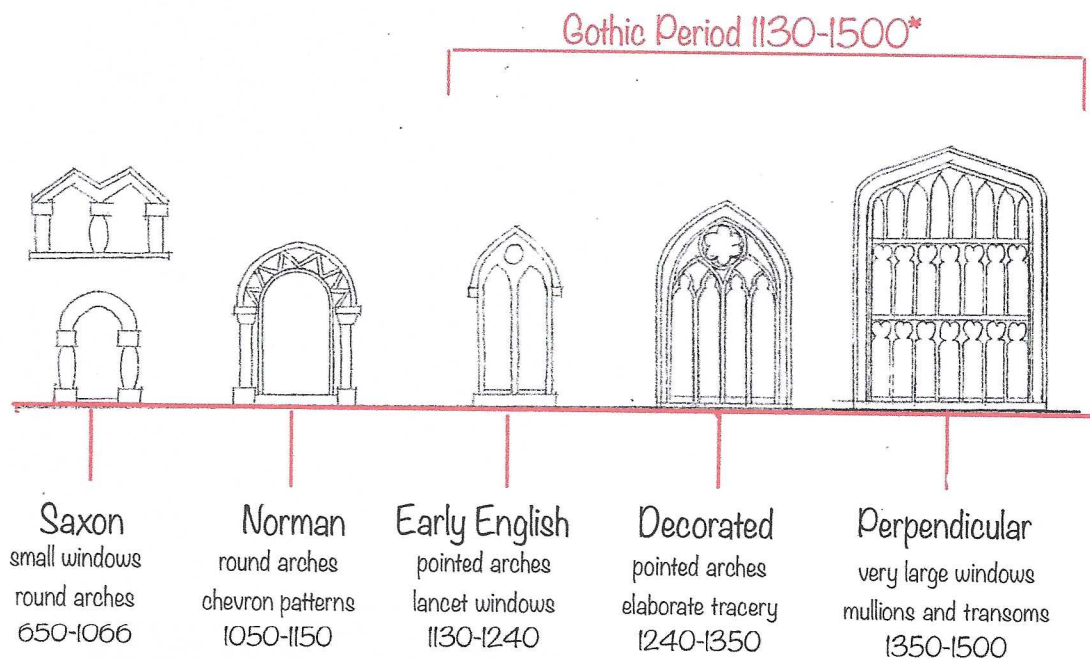
1. In early times physical proximity to a water supply was essential. Water was needed for the household – eating, cooking, drinking, washing etc and for the animals on which the household relied for food and indeed clothing. A river is a natural and bountiful source. There is therefore a tendency for early settlements to grow up near to rivers.
2. If the winter rains bring a flood that is a benefit for the adjacent land as it helps to fertilise the soil and ensure good pasture/hay for animals in the coming year. The Nile is an example of how an annual inundation can found and support one of the oldest civilisations for millennia
3. Early churches were usually built by local lords and it seems reasonable to suppose that they would be sited near to the settlement and particularly close to the lord's demesne. Once a site was established and presumably with a burial ground associated with it any rebuilding is likely to be based on that site. In earlier times before the bridge was built there seems to have been a ford in that part of Bodenham.
4. In medieval and earlier times rivers were much used for transport as roads were difficult, slow and expensive to travel by. The ratio of cost has been estimated as 8:4:2 ie road transport is twice as expensive as internal river transport which is twice as expensive as coastal transport.

This architectural section is not intended to summarise the expert assessments exactly but to highlight important or interesting elements which, it is hoped, will provide a starting point for the non specialist reader.

Bodenham church is described as Decorated Gothic. The characteristic of Gothic churches is the pointed arch used on windows and doorways. The use of this enabled larger windows to be inserted in thinner walls than had been possible in Norman and earlier churches. The timeline below shows the three stages of Gothic windows (Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular) In the absence of documentary evidence the design and shape of the windows and door arches is an important indicator of the building date along with the presence of buttresses and surface decoration applied to the stone.

(Author's note- the following descriptions largely relate to the church as it would have been when first built. Later modifications such as galleries and seating etc are described in the timeframe that they would have occurred)

Medieval Windows-Timeline



*Dates given are according to Pevsner

H.B. 2023

The Chancel:

The chancel was partly rebuilt in the 19th century so we cannot be sure what it would have looked like in the 14th century. The revised version of Pevsner's Architectural Guide claims "The extensive use of tufa in the chancel suggests a Norman origin" (The Buildings of England. Herefordshire 2012. Alan Brooks) so it is possible the footprint and a portion of the chancel walls were initially built in Norman times and perhaps rebuilt/refurbished in the 14th century. There is a blocked priest's door on the South side which dates from the 14th century and is evidence of the sharp distinction between the two areas of nave and chancel characteristic of medieval churches. The East window is 14th century (late Decorated gothic) but was reset higher at the

5. In the early days of the settlement the curved river provided some protection from marauders such as the Welsh and Danes.
And of course -
6. In the roughly 1000 years of a church such as Bodenham the river shape could have changed naturally. It will also have been affected by agricultural practices and commercial undertakings eg water mills in the Middle Ages, gravel extraction in the 20th century,

Construction materials

In common with most Herefordshire churches Bodenham was constructed largely of local stone ie Devonian sandstones either red or greenish in colour. There is a surprising amount of tufa particularly in the interior of the chancel. There is also some outside in the angle between the chancel and the South transept. The presence of tufa suggests an earlier church as tufa was a popular building material in Norman and earlier times (it starts off soft and is easy to cut but hardens when exposed to the atmosphere).

The National Heritage listing describes the materials as *part coursed sandstone rubble with ashlar dressings, part sandstone ashlar and also some tufa* . The 'rubble' stones would traditionally have been covered by plaster or rendering.

Orientation

The church is East-West oriented with the high altar at the Eastern end as are the great majority of churches in Western Christendom. This is generally thought to be because it is the direction of Jerusalem. However, many societies whether Christian or not traditionally buried their dead so they faced East. Of course most churches are not oriented exactly due East and this has led to much speculation as to why this is so. The most likely explanation is probably that the differences are due either to the topography or the season when building commences but there have been a number of studies to try to relate the orientation to the day the sun rises on the church's Saint's Day.

Responsibility for the building

Historically the Chancel was the responsibility of the Priest and he was responsible to the Patron or Rector who was required to build and pay for any repairs. The Nave has always been the responsibility of the laity. This sometimes results in a mismatch of styles and quality of building. At the time the present church was built the Chancel would have been the responsibility of Brecon Priory. The Nave would be the responsibility of the Parishioners.

The present building:

Bodenham church has been surveyed by experts; initially by the RCHME in the 1930's. This is available online:

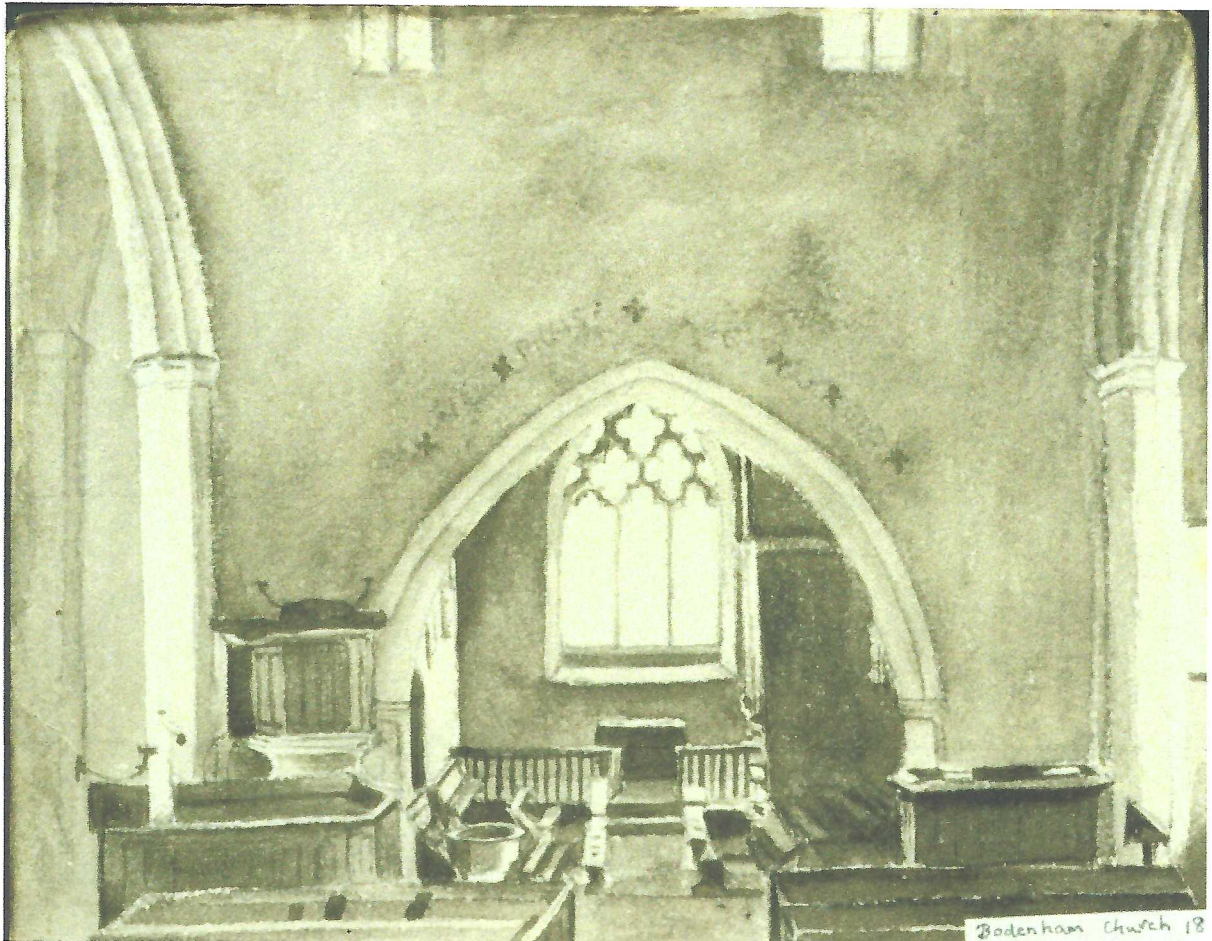
'Bodenham' in *An inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire, Volume 2, East*(London, 1932) pp12-17.

British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/rchme/heref/vol2/pp12-17>

An amended version (21-May-1987) can be found on Historic England's website:
historicengland.org.uk

The list entry number is: 1349790

same time as the chancel arch was raised (1899). The sketch below shows the chancel arch just before the Victorian makeover with its two Decorated gothic windows above which still remain.



The chancel was shortened by about 16 feet in the 1780's. We do not know whether that was principally done as a cost saving measure (the Patron was now a private individual) or because of a desire to bring the altar closer to the worshippers. Shortening the chancel probably explains the lack of a piscina at the East End and maybe why there is no evidence of a sedilia. *Author's note: see Dingley's sketch of the church (above) made before the chancel was shortened.*

The Tower:

The Royal Commission dated this as 'early 14th century' but Pevsner puts the date a little earlier 'begun late in the 13th century'. In practical terms there is little difference other than perhaps the tower might have been the first planned extension of the pre-existing church. Given the complexity (and expense) of building such an edifice the time to completion would almost certainly spill over into the early years of the 14th century. (See *history* : A digression on towers). All experts have commented on the incomplete spire but Pevsner's remark does it most justice "...finished with a funny but memorable feature of a little pyramid roof set on top of a never completed recessed spire".

The West door is either modern or completely restored. The windows above are Decorated style, (Y-tracery in the bell openings is characteristic of the early 14th century).

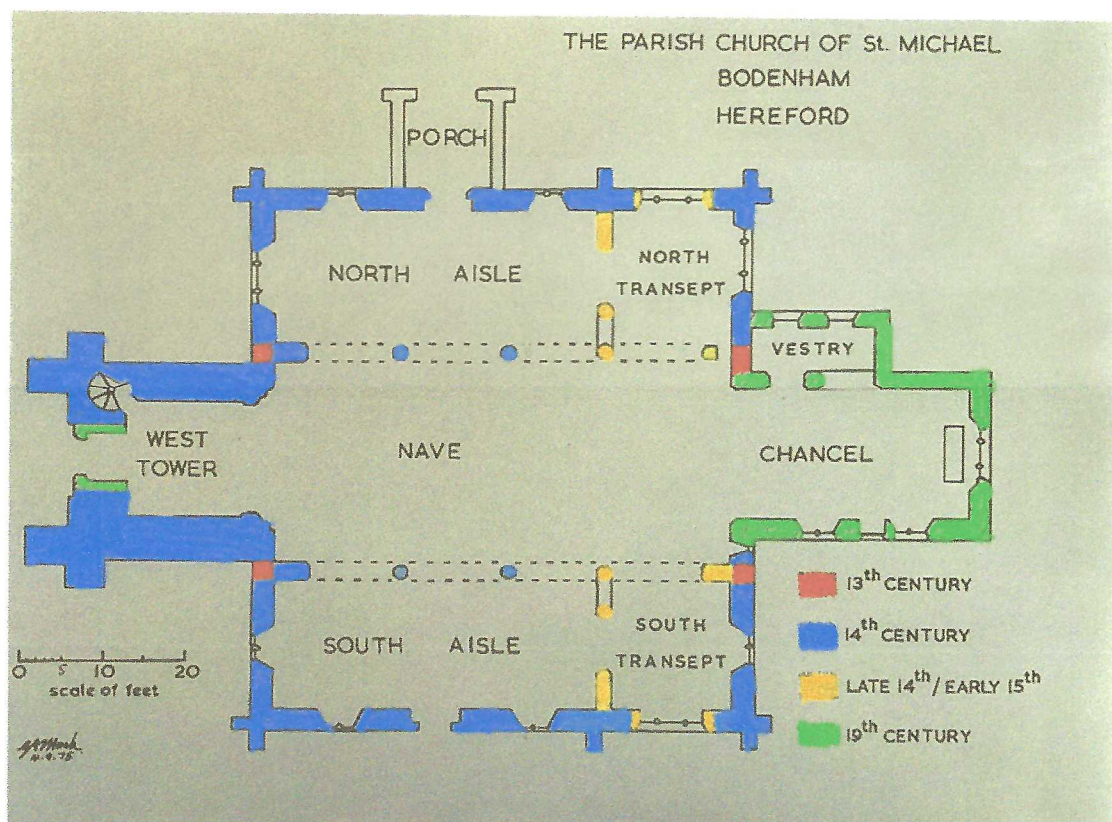
The Nave:

The present nave has the same footprint as an earlier church the RCHM described as “not earlier than 1200” (see areas coloured red). Early in the 14th century North and South aisles (coloured blue) were built to extend the area of the existing nave. The North and South arcades (the line of arches dividing the aisles from the nave) were constructed presumably providing support for the existing, relatively low pitched roof. Traces of this original roof can still be seen on the West wall of the nave. When first constructed the new aisles each had separate gabled roofs. So at that time there would have been three independent pitched roofs!

Around the North and South entrances are some ballflower decoration. This is first seen in England in the latter part of the 13th century and was popular during the early years of the 14th century. The device was much used on Hereford cathedral, Leominster priory and is seen on many parish churches around the County. It is a useful indicator of date of construction as it fell out of fashion about 1330.

Towards the end of the 14th century North and South transepts were constructed at the East end of the aisles (coloured yellow). The arcades were considerably raised at about the same time. The large North and South facing windows of the transepts are Perpendicular in style as they have transoms (horizontal stone bars) as well as mullions (vertical stone bars.)

The clerestory comprises three small windows above the North and South arcades. Possibly at the same time or a little later a new barrel or wagon roof was built for the nave and the pitched roofs of the aisles were replaced by pent roofs.



Contemporaneous Features to be found around the church:

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Piscina: The East end of the North and South Aisles each have a piscina or sacrarium which is to dispose of water used sacramentally: for example to wash the communion vessels after the Mass. Each of them would have drained directly into the earth ie sacred ground rather than going through a sewer. They are invariably an indicator that an altar was close by. The written records (see history section) confirm this was the case at Bodenham. As mentioned above the high altar almost certainly lost its piscina when the Chancel was shortened.

The remains of the Rood Loft:

East of the North arcade is a steep blocked staircase with an ogee opening arch. This would have led to the rood loft which might just have been a beam on which candles would be placed to light the Rood (that is the cross) itself. (More about rood lofts and screens can be found in the history section dealing with the Reformation)

Squints and the Lychnoscope:

Squints or hagioscopes as they are sometimes called are internal features which are intended to provide a view of the altar where there would otherwise be a blocked view. Both transepts have squints in their internal walls. The South transept squint has an ogee arch and is still open. It would have allowed the public in the nave to have a view of the altar and participate in a Mass conducted there. The North transept's squint now has a painted window inserted in it. The presence of the organ prevents any view of the transept area.

A lychnoscope is the name given to an unglazed window or opening which is frequently found near to the West end of the Chancel, usually on the South side which is lower than other windows and quite near the ground. Bodenham church has such a window and in common with many others still has a metal grid outside. Nowadays a painted glass window of St Michael seals the inside but that would not have been the case in medieval times. The problem here is in spite of many churches having lychnoscopes nobody nowadays knows what they were used for! Several functions have been suggested; these include allowing persons excluded from the building (either because they are undesirable in some way or have some outside task to perform such as ringing the sanctus bell) to see or at least hear the service.

Note: if the Bodenham version seems a bit higher from the ground than you would expect it could be because the level outside the church was lowered at the same time that internal floors were lowered (1891)

The Font:

Bodenham's font is reputedly 14th century and may have been first installed when the present church was built. It has had a chequered history as it was thrown out when the 1834 update was carried out and spent the next 50 years in a village wash house. It was refurbished in 1891 and reinstalled. It is octagonal with a thin ogee-trefoiled panel on each face. Many fonts have eight sides: a reminder of the new creation and the ceremony of circumcision which traditionally occurred on the eighth day.

The Effigies in Bodenham Church

Making effigies of the dead became popular in Britain around the middle of the 13th century. That was the first century when effigies of knights, ladies and civilians occur. Although many have been severely damaged by carelessness or deliberate vandalism a surprising number still exist in some form or another. The parish churches of England have been the resting place of most. Unfortunately it is frequently very difficult to identify who the effigies represent and even

when they were made. The problems arise for a number of reasons. First the dating of the effigy may be difficult to relate to when the person tentatively identified died. Effigies were sometimes made during the lifetime of the person and sometimes many years later. For example the effigy of Henry III was not made until 20 years after his death and the wooden effigy of the Duke of Normandy (Gloucester Cathedral) was apparently not made until the end of the thirteenth century and he died in 1134! Nor does heraldry help much more than identify the family as coats of arms are passed down to heirs over the generations. Clothing and armour also don't obviously change all that rapidly. Lastly the age as represented on the effigy may very well not relate to the subject's real age at death. There was certainly a period when effigies were traditionally sculpted as they would have been in their early 30's as that was the age when Jesus died.

As far as we know Bodenham had two effigies of which only one has survived to the present day. Fortunately, Thomas Dingley sketched both of them when he visited the church in the late 1600's. His work was ultimately published by the Camden Society in 1868.

The lady in the chancel:

She appears to have been sculpted from local stone which being rather soft may have resulted in her features appearing slightly blunted. The Royal Commission described her as follows

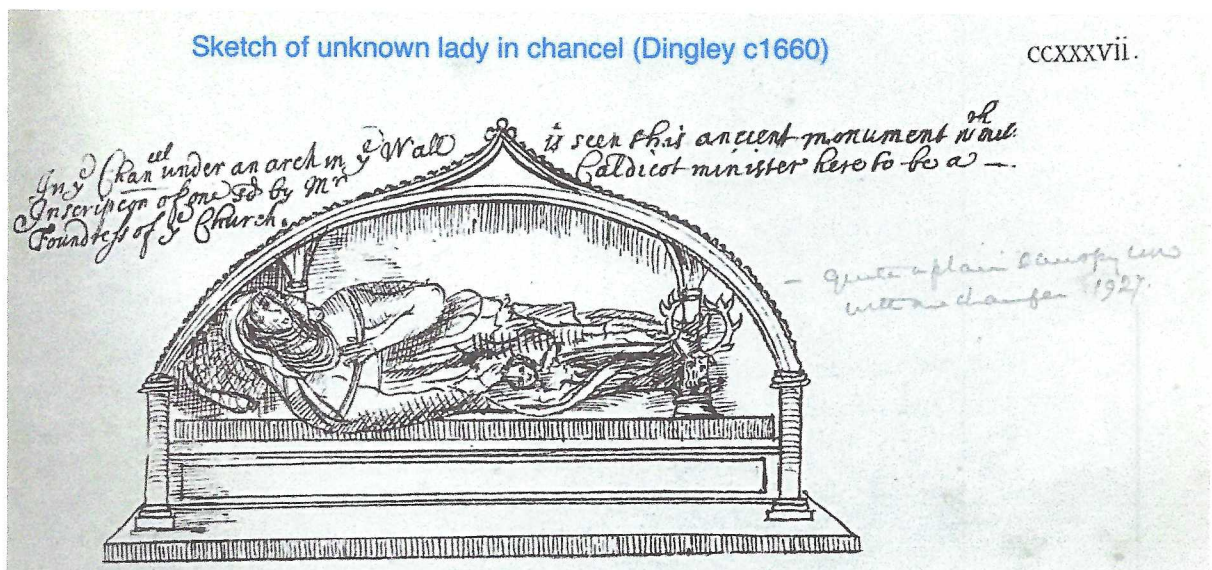
Stone effigy of woman with coif, wimple, long cloak right hand on small figure of child in folds of cloak, head on cushions, feet on defaced beast, early 14th century, partly defaced.

Her left hand is wearing a ring on the third finger, and the fingers of that hand are interlaced with the fastening of her cloak. The likelihood is she would at one time have been painted but all traces of paint have disappeared.

The current arch above the effigy does not accord with Dingley's sketch (see below). According to the Vicar's handwritten notes during the Victorian restoration-

"The arch over the recumbent figure was old and the order given to raise it "(18th September 1889)

A further feature of difference in Dingley's portrayal seems to be a stag's head at her feet which are nowadays resting on some unidentifiable animal body. The same stag's head was painted in one of the windows and might, just might, feature on the lady's family coat of arms! But at the moment we have been unable to trace who it might belong to.



The Devereux Effigy

Its location was according to Dingley -

"Under the staires(sic) leading up to the rood loft is seen the following monument of Alabaster in layd to ?a black matter of one Devoreux(sic), with a French circumscription about the Verge whereof what was visible I took

One of the earliest alabaster effigies was the tomb of Edward II who died (probably murdered) in 1327. His tomb was recently renovated and can be seen in Gloucester Cathedral. Although alabaster was first used by Royalty and senior clergy it quickly became the material of choice for effigies of nobles and knights.

When first cut alabaster is soft and easily worked but hardens with time. The material has an attractive lustre and luminosity when polished which approximates to human skin tone. Its drawback is that over time the surface becomes degraded and dulled by dirt and grease. By the time Dingley saw this effigy that had probably happened.



The effigy is thought to be Sir Walter Devereux who died c1383. For more information about him see History section.

It seems his effigy survived in the North Transept until the 1830's when it was accidentally smashed See History 1834 renovations.

Stained Glass Windows:

All of these have now disappeared but were still extant in the late 17th century when Dingley and Silas Taylor visited.

The North Aisle and Transept

Both writers mention the Arms of Richard II painted in a window in the North Aisle . Presumably the transepts and painted windows were completed before his reign ended in 1399. Since he was

deposed it is unlikely that there would be any later commemorative actions (see History section). Additionally, Dingley describes *'the remains of a white hart couchant gorged with a gold coronet and chain'* which Richard used as a badge (cf the Wilton Diptych-this shows Richard II on one side and on the reverse a white hart which meets the description of the version at Bodenham). Also (according to Dingley) there was an image of a stag's head in the North window which appears to be very similar to the stag's head he sketched at the foot of the lady in the chancel. So far it has not been possible to identify the family to which this might belong.

Additionally, Taylor describes two other coats of arms in the North windows:

Delabere – *azure, a bend cotized, or, between six martlets of the same.*

Brydges – *azure, on a cross, sable, a leopard's face, or*

The South Aisle and Transept

According to Taylor a portrait of John de Bradfield was painted in the East window of the South Aisle. The undated south chantry established sometime in the 14th century is described as "Jesus service" and in the Calendar of Patent Rolls 1549-51 as "John's Chantry". So it may be that the present side chapel in the South transept was not the one originally dedicated to Mary. Other Coats of Arms represented in the South facing windows are:

Lucy- Gules, three pikes(or lucys)or between six crosslets azure

Devereux-Gules, a fesse in chief, three torteaux

and two not identified by Taylor:

Gules, a chevron between three ducks, azure, beaked and feeted

Gules, a lion rampant, cross crosslet fitchee, azure

Contemporaneous decoration

The church walls would have been plastered or rendered apart from any ashlar finished stone. There would not have been any seating provided other than ledges or benches against the back walls for the elderly or infirm to give them some support. *(For more information see the history section dealing with the Reformation).*